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Viewing cable 08SANSALVADOR1331, YOUR VISIT TO EL SALVADOR

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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#08SANSALVADOR1331.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08SANSALVADOR1331	2008-12-03 14:45	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201106/notas/4412/>

VZCZCXYZ0008
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #1331/01 3381445
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031445Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
INFO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0396

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 001331

SIPDIS

FOR THE DIRECTOR FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KJUS](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: YOUR VISIT TO EL SALVADOR

Classified By: The Ambassador, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) I'm delighted that you'll be visiting El Salvador. Your presence here will reinforce the importance the U.S. places on maintaining a close, cooperative bilateral relationship with El Salvador. Your visit will also offer a boost to our efforts to address the nation's most pressing

problem: a public security crisis that has spiraled out of control. The Salvadorans will likely press you for concrete signs of U.S. appreciation for their efforts to combat transnational crime. We should support Salvadoran requests or suggestions that reinforce our shared goals in the areas of counter-narcotics, alien smuggling, and public security. At the same time, you should urge the Salvadorans to move forward on important public security issues such as passage of civil asset forfeiture and wiretap legislation, as well as progress on extradition issues.

Political Overview

12. (C) El Salvador's current political landscape is largely the result of the 1992 Peace Accords that ended the nation's twelve-year civil war. Under the agreement, the communist guerillas, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), laid down their weapons and became a legitimate political party. The government (GOES) in return agreed to disband elements of the military and security services notorious for human rights violations, to allow the FMLN to participate in the political process, to reform the judiciary, and to form a new National Civilian Police force (PNC) drawn from the ranks of demobilized guerillas and former members of the armed forces. In the ensuing years, the conservative, pro-U.S. National Republican Alliance Party (ARENA) has won every Presidential election.

13. (C) President Elias Antonio "Tony" Saca of the governing ARENA party assumed office June 1, 2004 after winning a hard-fought presidential race with 57.7 percent of votes cast. ARENA holds 34 of 84 seats in the Legislative Assembly, but aligns with smaller parties to form a working majority on important issues. The leftist FMLN holds 32 seats.

14. (C) Legislative and municipal elections will be held January 18, 2009 and presidential elections on March 15, with a runoff, if needed, in April. According to local polls, FMLN Presidential candidate Mauricio Funes holds a slight lead over ARENA candidate Rodrigo Avila. (Note: Avila twice served as director of the Salvadoran National Civilian Police, and was Deputy Minister of Public Security and Justice. He is respected and well-known in U.S. law enforcement circles. End note). Funes, a former journalist who hosted one of El Salvador's most popular television news programs, is the first FMLN Presidential candidate who is not a former guerilla leader. Funes' candidacy, fueled by name recognition and voter discontent over rising food and fuel prices and the perceived lack of shared economic benefits under ARENA stewardship, offers the FMLN its strongest opportunity yet to win the Salvadoran presidency.

15. (C) It is not clear what an FMLN victory would mean for the bilateral relationship. Funes and company have indicated publicly that they will continue to cooperate with the U.S. on counter-narcotics and transnational crime, and to support ongoing public security endeavors such as the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) and the Comalapa Cooperative Security Location (CSL). In contrast, the FMLN has strong links to Hugo Chavez and rest of the Bolivarian bloc, and Funes has promised to immediately withdraw Salvadoran forces from Iraq should he win the election.

Economic Overview

16. (C) After growing by over 4 percent each of the last two years, the Salvadoran economy now appears to be slowing and may head into recession in early 2009, depending on the extent of contagion from the United States. El Salvador was the first Central American country to implement CAFTA-DR, and exports, which have continued to increase through September 2008, remain the bright spot of the economy. Increasingly populist policies in the run-up to 2009 elections, including

costly subsidies for electricity, propane gas, and transportation, have led to increasing fiscal problems, and the government has recently experienced problems in placing its short-term debt. A number of international businesses have recently scaled back or shut down operations in El Salvador because of worldwide economic conditions. The security situation continues to impose a considerable operational cost on businesses and remains a detriment to foreign direct investment.

Civilian-Military Relations

¶7. (C) The Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) are capable, professional, and subordinate to civilian authority. The military consistently receives high approval ratings in public opinion polls, due largely to its response to national emergencies, including earthquakes, hurricanes, and outbreaks of infectious diseases such as Dengue. Salvadoran soldiers also support police in counter-narcotics efforts, anti-gang patrols, rural patrols, customs inspections, and reform-school training for juvenile convicts. El Salvador has had troops on the ground in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) since 2003. The Salvadoran contingent, which has concentrated on humanitarian reconstruction efforts, has suffered five fatalities since 2003. El Salvador was one of five countries invited by the GOI to stay on after the UN mandate expires December 31.

Immigration and TPS

¶8. (C) Some twenty-five percent of Salvadorans live in the United States, many illegally. Since the 2001 earthquakes, between 250,000 and 280,000 Salvadorans have benefited from Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and have been able to live and work legally in the United States. Remittances from Salvadorans living abroad provide an important source of income for their families in El Salvador. In 2006, remittances amounted to \$3.3 billion, approximately 18 percent of GDP. Public opinion polls also show that 7 out of 10 Salvadorans would emigrate to the United States if given the chance. The U.S. debate over immigration reform is followed very closely here, and the GOES has consistently lobbied for making TPS a permanent benefit for Salvadoran nationals. The GOES has also on various occasions approached the U.S. about ending the practice of deporting Salvadoran nationals. Salvadoran officials frequently infer that the country's spiraling violent crime rates are largely the result of the U.S. deporting illegal alien gang members back to El Salvador.

Counter-narcotics and Counter-terrorism

¶9. (C) The Salvadoran government is a valuable partner in the war on drugs. El Salvador is a transit country for narcotics, mainly cocaine and heroin. El Salvador is host to Central America's only Cooperative Security Location (CSL), as well as to Latin America's International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), which provides law enforcement training to personnel from El Salvador and the region. The CSL agreement expires August 23, 2010. We have formally requested a five-year extension from the GOES, but have as yet received no answer.

¶10. (C) U.S.-funded training and equipment have contributed significantly to improvements in the National Civilian Police (PNC) Counter-narcotics Division. El Salvador's geographic position makes it vulnerable to those trafficking drugs, drug proceeds (in the form of bulk currency shipments), people, and guns to or from the United States. JIATF-South, with its ability to provide Salvadoran authorities with real-time intelligence, is a great asset; however, the ESAF need additional resources to help us take full advantage of JIATF's capabilities.

El Salvador and Regional Efforts on Transnational Crime

¶11. (C) El Salvador has assumed an important leadership role in regional efforts to improve public security in Central America. As host to the Transnational Anti-gang Unit (TAG), the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), and the Comalapa Cooperative Security Location (CSL), the GOES is at the forefront of efforts to curtail transnational street gang activity, to disrupt maritime narcotics trafficking routes, and to strengthen the rule of law throughout the hemisphere. The government of El Salvador enthusiastically supports the Merida Initiative, and continues to aggressively push the Central American Integration System (SICA in Spanish) to implement a comprehensive regional plan for improving public security.

¶12. (C) Despite the aforementioned successes, there is still much that can be improved upon. Passage of wire tap legislation would give Salvadoran law enforcement a vital tool against street gangs, drug traffickers, and money launderers. Enactment of a civil asset forfeiture statute would help to offset the significant budget shortfalls faced by the National Civilian Police and the judicial sector. Moving forward on extradition would help to ensure that neither Salvadoran nor American criminals find safe haven and avoid punishment for crimes they commit. To the extent possible, I urge you to use your interactions with Salvadoran officials to both congratulate them on their many successes, and to encourage them to establish an even stronger foundation for U.S.-Salvadoran law enforcement cooperation.
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